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Times Community News

National Night Out highlights empowered neighborhoods

By Rose Herrera
Special to the Times

Evergreen neighborhoods banded together organizing 15 National Night Out (NNO) events this past Tuesday evening. I was encouraged by this unprecedented local participation during the national organization's 28th year.

Public safety is an integral part of my strategy to strengthen our communities, which is why I reached out to neighborhoods encouraging residents to host these events. National Night Out (NNO) invites neighborhoods to host block-by-block parties, barbecues, ice cream socials and other fun activities that gets neighbors out on their streets spending time getting to know each other. Getting to know your neighbors makes you and your neighborhood safer.

My staff and I attended most of the events. What I saw as I was greeted by neighbors across Evergreen is the strengthening of neighborhood spirit, sense of community empowerment and public safety partnerships.

NNO events can be a spring board to the development of ongoing neighborhood associations. My staff and I provided neighborhood leaders with Neighborhood Association Starter Kits to enable a quick start for getting registered with the city and opportunities to apply for grants. Empowered neighborhoods are highly effective in improving the quality of life for you and your neighbors. Here are a few examples of how empowered neighbors have improved their neighborhoods by coming together for common causes. The initial reasons for organizing vary from neighborhood to neighborhood but the results are still the same - making a difference.

As I arrived at the first event organized by Maria Lopez and Gracie Garcia-Ramos at Meadowfair Community Center there were children having their faces painted, toddlers enjoying

ice cream and a community of cross-generational neighbors who have been united by a common effort to keep their community center open and full of programming. Even though this celebration took place just outside of the old Meadowfair building, within a few weeks the community will be celebrating the opening of Kidango, a not-for-profit child development company which will provide childcare services, a renovated center and meeting space for the community. This project is something I have been fighting for since I first took office and I'm pleased to say will soon be a reality.

Neighbors of Montecito Drive have a tradition of 13 consecutive years of celebrating NNO. Organizer Karen Teuthorn knows how to make this event friendly and welcoming. As I arrived local high school and college-aged students were gathered celebrating with their friends and families. Their local garage band played tunes for the crowd and the fire/medic crew from local Fire Station 31 delighted the kids with tours of the fire trucks as well as honorary junior firemen stickers.

Last year I attended a neighborhood watch organized by Rama Gurram who has been a leader in helping improve his neighborhood focusing on making sure kids are safe when playing in the park and reporting and cleaning up graffiti tagging. Last night he and Residents of the Tapestry Park neighborhood celebrated NNO in the park with picnic dinners. Neighbors here are working toward organizing a new neighborhood association which will help continue their efforts beyond a yearly event to year round community involvement.

Some groups, such as the

neighbors on Watkins Way, have taken it to the next level showing civic entrepreneurship by engaging in "greening the block" energy talks to address pressing local energy needs. Thanks to NNO organizers Jacqueline Gamaza, and Nichole Edraos, Watkins Way residents are looking for innovative ways to address local needs by harnessing the energy and resources from within their neighborhood and come together to prioritize issues and brain

storm alternative solutions. This celebration also featured a pie making contest and a movie night.

At every stop, I encouraged Evergreen residents to establish neighborhood associations. Neighborhood associations are not a new concept but now more than ever their role in the community is crucial for many reasons. As municipal budgets and service capacities are stressed and stretched, neighborhood associations can play a role in helping to unite neighborhoods, making them safer and improving the quality of life. In addition, it will provide them with a strong voice for issues affecting them and create an opportunity for creative entrepreneurial solutions.

Thanks to all the organizers of these events. It is an encouraging sign that leadership in our community is being fostered and realized. If you received a neighborhood association packet at NNO, consider becoming one of those "average" residents who make a difference and start your own neighborhood association. Contact my office at (408) 535-4908 or email us at district8@sanjoseca.gov. I am here to support you in your efforts and help you get started.



**District 8
Report**

By Rose Herrera
City Councilmember

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